



# A NETWORK THAT WORKS

## Advancing Proactive Agendas to Help Working Families Thrive



Children living in New Mexico—75 percent of whom are children of color—have long faced high barriers to realizing their full potential. Their state is the nation's poorest, with the highest unemployment rate and lowest rate of job growth. New Mexican children have the nation's worst ratings for well-being, poverty, and education. Over the past decade, New Mexico slashed funding for K-12 education and higher education, causing tuition to skyrocket at the state's colleges and universities. Human services and infrastructure were seriously underfunded.

New Mexico Voices for Children knew that these problems were the result of years of aggressive tax cuts for corporations and wealthy households, which hollowed out funding for public schools and services without delivering the job growth that politicians had promised.

**With the future of New Mexico's families on the line, and bolstered by the nationwide State Priorities Partnership, New Mexico Voices for Children and its allies rose to the challenge.** Building on the success of other State Priorities Partnership groups, they set their sights on the 2019 legislative session to put New Mexico on a new and better course.



For years, the challenge had been clear: **New Mexico Voices for Children needed to make the case to policymakers, candidates, and constituents that a brighter future could be achieved not through a tired agenda of corporate tax cuts, but through smart new investments** in schools, health care, infrastructure, and New Mexico’s most valuable asset—its people.

To craft an effective strategy, New Mexico Voices for Children drew on the experience of State Priorities Partnership peers in states such as New Jersey and Virginia that had successfully paved the way for powerful change when a window of opportunity opened. New Jersey Policy Perspective’s *Blueprint for Economic Justice & Shared Prosperity* served as the foundation for a broad coalition that successfully won \$1.5 billion in new revenue for the state in 2019. The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis’s *Building Opportunity: A Toolkit for Virginia’s Future* helped win the lengthy battle to expand Medicaid in Virginia.

**New Mexico Voices for Children worked closely with an existing long-term coalition of 25 state and local organizations**—including the Center for Civic Policy, Somos Un Pueblo Unido, Organizers in the Land of Enchantment, the Food and Agricultural Policy Group, the League of Women Voters, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, ProgressNow NM, health- and faith-based groups, and teacher and state employee unions—to **envision a policy agenda that would put the interests of New Mexico’s families first**. The coalition was driven by the experiences and needs of New Mexican community members, who are predominantly people of color, as it formulated policy recommendations, created effective messaging campaigns, leveraged relationships with policymakers, and implemented coordinated advocacy strategies. **The result was a broad set of proposals to help New Mexico’s families thrive no matter where they live, how much money they earn, their place of birth, or the color of their skin.**

With ongoing, hands-on support from Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) staff and consultants, as well as long-term support from national and local funders, these proposals became the *Roadmap to a Stronger New Mexico*, a powerfully articulated and well-designed policy agenda and issue campaign.



By the summer of 2018, bolstered by the vision and energy of local partners and supported by CBPP staff every step of the way, New Mexico Voices for Children was ready to deploy its agenda to drive legislative change at a crucial moment. The governor’s seat was open, and all of New Mexico’s executive offices were up for election, as were all 70 seats in the state House of Representatives. This presented an opportunity to educate prospective candidates and constituents about the connection between tax and budget policy and child and family well-being in preparation for the coming legislative year.

**New Mexico Voices for Children leveraged its status as the state’s KIDS COUNT® organization, and the fact that New Mexico had fallen to 50th in child well-being in 2018, to demonstrate that raising revenue and improving tax fairness were crucial to improving child well-being.** It used a variety of outreach strategies to engage constituents and hold leaders accountable for starving public investments. Its communication efforts included a campaign website, numerous publications, eight blogs, nine fact sheets, and more than 30 presentations to nearly 2,000 people across the state. Its email list grew to include 12,000 subscribers, and it hired its own digital communications specialist to further strengthen its outreach capacity.

**New Mexico Voices for Children used specific messaging and sophisticated tools to reach out to the following groups:**

- **Targeted voters:** Working with CBPP, New Mexico Voices for Children identified a group of 250,000 likely voters, about 40 percent of the people who would vote. In the months prior to the election, these likely voters received regular mail, email, and social media communications, each one highlighting how a particular policy—such as an increase to the state minimum wage or higher funding for K–12 education—would benefit their families and communities.

- **Candidates in the 2018 election:** Long before Election Day, New Mexico Voices for Children began educating gubernatorial and legislative candidates of both parties about the connection between tax and budget issues and child and family well-being. Many of those candidates, including now-Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, incorporated the tax and budget policy recommendations into their campaign platforms.

- **Impacted communities:** New Mexico Voices for Children also provided state and local partners with messaging directed to specific constituencies, such as information for teachers’ unions showing how teachers would benefit.

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**STRONG EDUCATION, STRONG HEALTH CARE, AND STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE, THAT’S WHAT MATTERS MOST TO NEW MEXICO, AND WE NEED TO INVEST IN THESE.”**

–Representative Christine Chandler

**THE ROADMAP TO A STRONGER NEW MEXICO**

Roadmap to a Stronger New Mexico  
625 Silver Ave. SW, Suite 195  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

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If we want to leave our children a New Mexico that lives up to its full potential, we have more work to do. New Mexico needs a new direction, and we can get there by investing in our families, our education, our health care, and our infrastructure. Together, we can build a stronger New Mexico.

<p><b>Invest in Working Families</b></p> <p>Raise the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour by 2022, increase existing tax credits, introduce new tax credits for low- and middle-income families, support low-income housing, and adopt paid sick/family leave policies.</p>	<p><b>Invest in Public Education</b></p> <p>Increase early education funding and K-12 per-pupil funding, expand bilingual education funding, restore the College Affordability Fund, make the lottery scholarship need-based, and fully implement the Indian Education Act.</p>	<p><b>Invest in Health Care</b></p> <p>Support full implementation of all state provisions of the Affordable Care Act, fully fund Medicaid, pass common sense gun safety laws, re-open school-based health centers, and increase funding for suicide and drug use prevention programs.</p>	<p><b>Invest in Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Invest in repairing our streets, highways, and bridges, fund new infrastructure development projects across New Mexico, strengthen broadband infrastructure, and create well-paying jobs so we can provide for our families.</p>
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NEW MEXICO VOICES FOR CHILDREN



The 2018 election ushered in a new Democratic governor and a 24-seat Democratic advantage in the House. The majority of people elected were women, and many were women of color. But New Mexico Voices for Children still faced an uphill battle. Not only would it have to convince state lawmakers to increase taxes, but because a spike in oil and gas revenues had led to an unprecedented budget surplus going into 2019, there was a misconception that the state had plenty of resources.

During the short interim period between the 2018 election and the 2019 legislative session, **New Mexico Voices for Children kept up momentum.** Its staff met with and educated lawmakers and cabinet leaders and engaged their constituents and opinion leaders about the unmet needs of families and children, as well as the need to raise *sustainable* revenue for the state’s deflated budget. This was accomplished through TV, radio, and newspaper interviews, and by focusing heavily on social media, which grew New Mexico Voices for Children’s Facebook following from a little more than 2,000 to more than 10,000 in just a few months.

New Mexico Voices for Children’s strategic communications and relationship-building efforts—which began long before the election and persisted throughout the legislative cycle—helped ensure that lawmakers and constituents stayed on course. **Thanks to early candidate engagement efforts, the newly elected legislature was filled with people who were passionate and knowledgeable about how reforms in tax policy could raise revenue and help their constituents and state.** New Mexico Voices for Children and its allies heard their talking points and messaging repeated in hearings and floor debates. When the governor appeared on the public affairs show *New Mexico in Focus* and was asked about taxes, she specified support for three of the revenue policies New Mexico Voices for Children had brought to her attention. And the one Republican representative to vote in favor of the tax omnibus bill that New Mexico Voices for Children was behind said she did so because of calls about the bill she received from her constituents. **At the end of the 2019 legislative session, legislative leadership called out New Mexico Voices for Children’s tax campaign as a model for effective advocacy,** and New Mexico Voices for Children Executive Director James Jimenez was appointed to the governor’s tax commission.

**“WE’RE MAKING THE BIGGEST INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION IN THE HISTORY OF OUR STATE.”**

..... Speaker Brian Ego





## **New Mexico Voices for Children’s lawmaker and constituent engagement efforts paid off handsomely.**

In April 2019, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed reforms into law that reduce tax breaks for multistate corporations and the state’s wealthiest people, boost incomes for low-income households, and lessen the state’s overreliance on volatile oil revenues. Policymakers were able to invest more in children and infrastructure and to advance racial, ethnic, and gender equity.

### **The enacted reforms:**

- boost the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit from 10 percent to 17 percent of the federal credit, putting about \$40 million more into the pockets of 200,000 individuals and families;
- raise the state minimum wage to \$12 per hour by 2023;
- invest \$450 million in K–12 education;
- raise pay for school employees by six percent and pay for other state workers by four percent;
- invest \$250 million in roads and highways;
- improve funding for health care services and fully fund Medicaid; and
- increase funding for a program serving children with developmental disabilities.

**These changes mean a brighter future for children in New Mexico.** They will attend more adequately funded schools. Their families won’t have to struggle as hard to make ends meet. They will travel on safer roads and have better access to health care.

New Mexico Voices for Children and its partners have taken a big first step toward transformative change for their state, and their work continues. **New Mexico is a state on the move, and other states are taking notice.** New Mexico Voices for Children’s leaders have been traveling across the country explaining how they laid the groundwork for these changes, and the State Priorities Partnership is working to replicate the model elsewhere.

## **A NETWORK THAT WORKS**

New Mexico Voices for Children’s victory was enabled by the State Priorities Partnership—a network that, for over two decades, has fought to create more equitable tax systems and leverage state investments to help individuals and families make ends meet. Now comprising more than 40 state organizations across the country, the **State Priorities Partnership** invests in state-level policy leaders, fosters strong and sustainable organizations, shares learning among its members, and builds a national audience for key state policy advances.

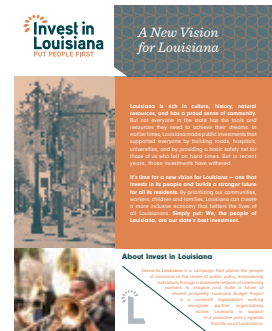
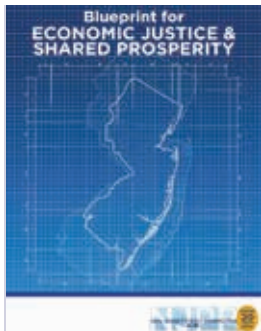
Thanks to the State Priorities Partnership, New Mexico’s success is already reverberating in other states. **More than 20 State Priorities Partnership organizations have developed proactive agendas or are in the planning stages of doing so.**

These groups are assisted not only by CBPP staff but also by staff from New Mexico Voices for Children, who—at convenings and other less formal gatherings—share with peers what they have learned.

They have demonstrated that, with intentional, proactive efforts, it is possible to make progress in addressing the economic policies that reinforced systemic racism, white supremacy, and gender bias. They connected with stakeholders to develop policy solutions informed by the lived experiences of the communities that have been most affected by economic struggles and the dark aspects of our nation’s history. **By following this model, we can tell a different story about what America can be when tax and budget policies become a tool for unleashing the potential of people and communities who have been marginalized by racism and economic inequality.**

# SEE INSIDE

See inside for more details about *Roadmap to a Stronger New Mexico*, the State Priorities Partnership, and our proactive agendas across the country.



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